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First record of Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica* in the Federated States of Micronesia

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Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica* exhibits a spotty distribution from the Andaman and Nicobar islands (India) east to the Philippines and Republic of Palau (south-western Micronesia), and south through Indonesia and the New Guinea region to the Solomons (Baptista *et al.* 1997). It has a predilection for small, remote, and relatively undisturbed islands for breeding, sometimes in dense colonies, but the species disperses widely to larger islands and adjacent mainland areas to feed, often making lengthy overseas flights (Gibbs *et al.* 2001, BirdLife International 2009). Nicobar Pigeon is considered Near Threatened, with declining numbers throughout most of its range because of over-hunting, exploitation for the pet trade, habitat destruction, and predation by introduced mammals (BirdLife International 2008). However, the distinct Palau subspecies *C. n. pelewensis* has increased dramatically in recent years, possibly because of a local ban on shotguns, after being close to extinction immediately following World War II (Baker 1951, Pratt & Etpison 2008). Although it forages mostly on the ground, Nicobar Pigeon is a powerful flyer (Delacour 1959, Goodwin 1983, Gibbs *et al.* 2001), and highly nomadic (Baptista *et al.* 1997), thus making the species predisposed to reach distant islands outside its normal range. Observations on Tench Island, in the northern Bismarck archipelago, indicated that Nicobar Pigeons commuted daily to forage on the larger islands to the south (Coates 1977; G. Dutton *in litt.* 2009), and, according to local reports (in Coates 1977), they leave the island altogether at certain times of the year but where they go is unknown.

A Nicobar Pigeon (Figs. 1–2) captured alive in Pohnpei (Fig. 3) on 3 November 2009 is the first documented record for the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Members of a local family working in a patch of agroforest in Nanmand Village, Kitti Municipality, in the south-west of the island first observed the bird then captured it by hand in the same area later in the day after seeing the bird run along a forest trail. They brought it to GS, who then showed it to JW who photographed the bird. GS kept the pigeon in captivity for a short time in an attempt to rehabilitate it, but the bird died on 5 November and the remains



Figures 1–2. Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica* captured on Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, 3 November 2009 (J. Wichep)

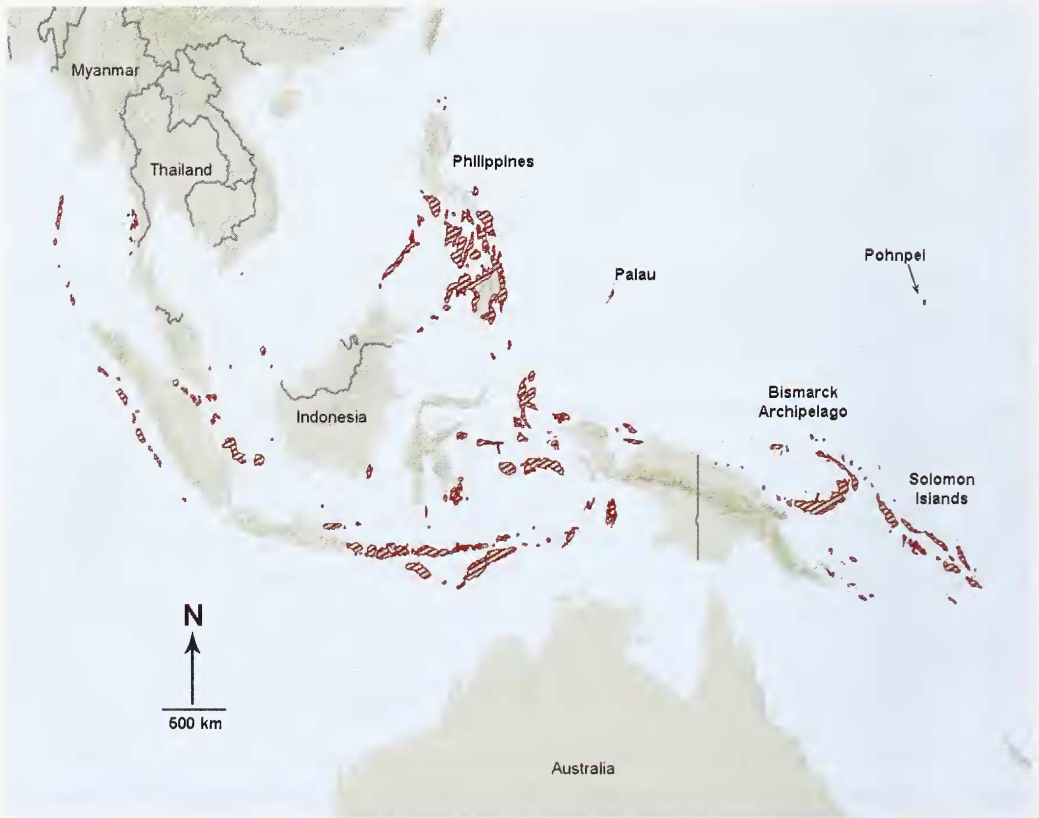


Figure 3. Range of Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica*; modified, with permission, from BirdLife International (2008).

were discarded in a compost heap. JW sent the photographs to DWB for identification, and GS subsequently retrieved the carcass on 9 November and brought it to the College of Micronesia, where the skeleton was preserved and is currently held.

The nearest population from which the Pohnpei bird could have originated is in north-eastern Melanesia, c.1,500 km to the south across mostly open ocean. The only resident population of *C. nicobarica* in the Caroline Islands, of which Pohnpei is a part, is in Palau,

c.2,500 km to the west (but with numerous islands as potential intermediary stops). The endemic Palau subspecies differs from the nominate form in the rest of the range by its smaller size, shorter, less attenuated neck hackles (some with bifurcate tips), and bluer (less green and coppery) iridescent dorsal feathers (Baker 1951, Goodwin 1983, Gibbs *et al.* 2001). (Note that Baptista *et al.* 1997 incorrectly depict *C. n. pelewensis* with all of the hackles bifurcate.) Compared with a series of specimens of the nominate subspecies and single examples each of adult *C. n. pelewensis* in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC (S. L. Olson *in litt.* 2009) and the American Museum of Natural History, New York (M. LeCroy *in litt.* 2009), the coloration in the photographs of the Pohnpei bird is closer to that of *C. n. nicobarica* than *C. n. pelewensis*. Also, the neck hackles of the Pohnpei bird were longer and narrower than those shown in published photographs of *C. n. pelewensis* (Pratt & Etpison 2008) and none were bifurcate. Measurements (in mm) of the coracoid (greatest length 47.8, least shaft width 4.2, sternal facet width 11.2, sternal facet depth 4.8) of the Pohnpei specimen all fall near or at the upper range limits of *C. n. nicobarica* reported in Balouet & Olson (1989) [skeletal material of *C. n. pelewensis* not available], and the measurements of the humerus (distal width 13.8), and length of radius (67.8), exceed the range limits (12.5–13.4 and 58.4–64.3, respectively, $n = 21$). However, the skeletal material of *C. n. nicobarica* examined by Balouet & Olson (1989) included many zoo birds and their measurements may differ somewhat from wild-caught birds. Whether the larger and longer wing bone measurements in the Pohnpei bird represent extreme individual variation, or if they are characteristic of the local population whence it came is unknown, but they eliminate derivation from Palau.

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